



NEWSLETTER

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF VETERANS AFFAIRS

SOUTH DAKOTA DEPARTMENT OF THE MILITARY



APRIL IS MONTH OF THE MILITARY CHILD

April marks the nation's "Month of the Military Child," a time to honor military youth in communities who have been impacted by deployments, as well as the unique opportunities and challenges that all military children face.

The South Dakota National Guard invites everyone to join in and be part of "Purple Up! For Military Kids Day," being held April 17.

South Dakotans are encouraged to wear purple on that date and share their photos through social media as a tangible way to show their support and thank all military children for their strength and sacrifices.

"This is a perfect time to celebrate military children and to recognize their character, strength and resilience," said Taryn Broomfield, SDNG Child and Youth Program lead coordinator. "Our military youth are impacted daily, whether their service member is home, deployed, at drill, or away attending training or school."

There are more than 6,400 military children in South Dakota with parents or guardians who serve in the National Guard, Reserves and active duty. Of these children and youth, over 3,800 are affiliated with the SDNG.

Gov. Kristi Noem demonstrated her support of military kids by signing a proclamation announcing April 2020 as the Month of the Military Child.

Established by Casper Weinberger in 1986, the Month of the Military Child recognizes the important role military children play in our communities. We pause each year to honor the millions of military children for their contributions to their families.

"Military kids are an integral part of our families and communities, and they serve too," said Broomfield. "Please celebrate the military children in your life and thank them."

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SDDVA UPDATE

Through this challenging time, SDDVA's team stands strong and continues to serve our veterans and their families. Our team at the Michael J. Fitzmaurice State Veterans Home is doing great, and as always, stand committed to our mission to take care of our veterans regardless of this unprecedented pandemic. They have prepared for and are committed to the challenges we might face.

Our staff in the Pierre, Rapid City, and Watertown offices are working from home and are available via cell phone, texts and emails. Some members of our Sioux Falls team are working from home and some are splitting shifts in the office. As always, our teams stand ready to assist our veterans and their families.

Three members of our team have recently relocated their offices to the South Dakota Military Heritage Alliance Building in Sioux Falls.

The Alliance will be home for Deputy Secretary Aaron Pollard, Program Manager Erin Brown, and Field Service Officer Brett Dickerson.

Their new offices are located at 1600 W. Russell Street in Sioux Falls.

The building features a gun range, full kitchen and bar, and eventually a military museum and offices of the local Sioux Falls American Legion and Veterans of Foreign War Posts.

Life may have thrown us a curve, but as we have done in the past, we will continue to fight the fight, shoulder to shoulder (six feet away) with our partners. We have borne the battle before, and we can do it again.

We encourage all of you to visit COVID-19 in South Dakota (<https://covid.sd.gov/>). The Governor's team and the Departments of Health, Labor, Human Services and Social Services are updating it daily and are providing great information on COVID-19 status, FAQ, unemployment benefits and more.

Please stay in contact with a member of our team and don't forget to do your buddy checks -- via phone, text, or email! Be safe.



COVID-19 in South Dakota

Questions about COVID-19? We're here to help.

➔ Call South Dakota's Information Line at **1-800-997-2880**

VR&E HAS CENTRALIZED RECEIPT OF PAPER NATIONWIDE

Veterans enrolled in the Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) Program, based on the current COVID-19 national impact, VR&E communications have shifted to digital service delivery. In order to maintain the flow of communication, we are implementing centralized receipt of paper mail nationwide.

To ensure program participant documents are received in a timely fashion, VR&E requests that all program participants send your correspondence to the following address:

**Department of Veterans Affairs
Vocational Rehabilitation & Employment (VR&E) Intake Center
PO Box 5210
Janesville, WI 53547-5210**

Once your mail is received at this location, it will be processed and made available to your Vocational Rehabilitation Counselor digitally.

Veterans Benefits Administration has successfully utilized centralized receipt of paper mail for other programs and is excited to expand this communication to VR&E program participants.

TAP UPDATE

Effective March 30, the VA will discontinue VA benefit briefings and services on military installations for transitioning service members and their families through the interagency [Transition Assistance Program \(TAP\)](#) until further notice.

However, the VA will provide virtual briefings and individualized counseling for transitioning service members where possible. Service members who have not received these briefings, as required by TAP, may access the [Joint Knowledge](#)

[Online \(JKO\)](#) platform and register for "TGPS-US006: VA Benefits and Services."



VETERANS GI BILL BENEFITS TO CONTINUE DURING COVID- 19 PANDEMIC

President Trump signed into law [S. 3503](#), March 21, which will enable the United States Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to continue providing the same level of education benefits to students having to take courses online due to the [coronavirus \(COVID-19\) outbreak](#).

The law gives the VA temporary authority to continue GI Bill payments uninterrupted in the event of national emergencies, allowing for continued payment of benefits even if the program has changed from resident training to online training.

Thanks to the law, GI Bill students will continue receiving the same monthly housing allowance payments they received for resident training until Dec. 21, or until the school resumes in-person classes.

In the wake of COVID-19, thousands of students nationwide have been converted to distance learning as many educational institutions are transitioning to technology-based lesson delivery.

"I commend President Trump and Congress for their work on this important law," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "It will give veteran students certainty as they continue their education."

Students receiving [GI Bill benefits](#) are not required to take any action. Benefits will continue automatically.

The VA will work closely with schools to ensure enrollments are accurately certified and processed timely. Updates will be provided to students via direct email campaigns and social media regarding the VA's effort to implement these new changes.

SDDVA's Shane Olivier (605-773-3648) and Ryan Fowler (605-773-3565) are available to answer any questions you might have about apprenticeship programs, on-the-job training programs and GI Bill education benefits.



UPDATE FROM VA BLACK HILLS HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The VA Black Hills Health Care System is committed to providing high-quality care while keeping veterans safe from the coronavirus (COVID-19). Effective March 30, 2020, the Rapid City Community Based Out-patient Clinic (CBOC) will transition care to virtual options. Primary care and mental health routine appointments will be moved to telehealth through phone or video.

“Through the VA’s virtual care tools, we are able to leverage available technology to make sure that our patients and staff are as safe as possible during this time,” said Sandra Horsman, Director, VA Black Hills Health Care System.

To help us address the most urgent needs first, VA Black Hills Health Care System asks that veterans use our online tools for routine or non-urgent questions.

- Use Secure Messaging—Veterans can send a secure message to your provider about any health concern or question. <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/>
- Download VA Video Connect—Provider may ask veteran to consider telehealth for an upcoming appointment. By downloading and learning about the VA Video Connect app now, veterans can prepare themselves. <https://mobile.va.gov/appstore>
- Refill prescriptions by phone, My HealtheVet or the Rx Refill Mobile App to safely receive medications through the mail.
- For veterans in crisis, connect with caring and qualified professionals with the Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255 Press 1.

Because this is a rapidly changing situation, the best way to get the most up-to-date information is to follow the VABHHCS Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/VABlackHills/> and website at <https://www.blackhills.va.gov/>

The VA continues to strongly encourage veterans, staff members and their families to take everyday precautions such as frequent handwashing and social distancing to protect against respiratory illnesses caused by COVID-19, the flu and the common cold.

For more information about scheduling, please use our Contact Center at 1-877-339-6837.



VA INCREASES CAPACITY BY 4,000 BEDS TO COMBAT COVID - 19

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) announced April 1, that it has successfully increased its ICU and Medical/Surgical bed capacity by over 4,000 across the nation. These beds, along with the staff, equipment, and personal protective equipment required to operate them, are critical to the treatment of Veterans and civilians infected with COVID-19. The VA historically had approximately 1,000 ICU beds and 6,000 Medical/Surgical beds, and now has more than 2,300 and 8,500 respectively.

“Our frontline medical personnel have been working tirelessly around the clock to prepare for an influx of Veterans infected with COVID-19, and we are now treating hundreds of cases.” said VA Secretary Robert Wilke. “Simultaneously, we have been working to enhance as many beds as possible to be equipped with what is necessary to care for those infected, both veterans and non-veterans if need be.”

The VA is part of the National Disaster Medical System, which positions it as a backstop to the nation’s private medical facilities when States have exhausted their capacity to provide care. At this time, the VA has been assigned two such missions in New York and New Jersey.

States may request assistance from the Federal Government through their local Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) Regional Emergency Coordinator (REC), as part of FEMA’s National Response Coordination Center. Counties, cities, and other municipalities should route all requests for Federal support through their respective states. The VA cannot receive direct requests for assistance from state and local governments.

DIRT WORK BEGINS AT STATE VETERANS CEMETERY



Journey Construction and their team report that dirt work has started on the state veterans cemetery.



UPDATE FROM SIOUX FALLS VA HEALTH CARE SYSTEM

The Sioux Falls VA Health Care System is committed to providing high-quality care while keeping veterans safe from the coronavirus (COVID-19).

“Due to COVID-19 precautionary measures and out of concern for our veterans, we are honoring current social isolation and distancing guidelines,” said Lisa Simoneau, director, Sioux Falls VA HCS. “Through VA’s virtual care tools, we are able to leverage available technology to make sure that our patients and staff are as safe as possible during this time.” To help us address our veterans’ most-urgent needs first, the Sioux Falls VA asks that veterans use our online tools for routine or non-urgent questions.

Telephone or Video Appointments – Veterans can receive care at home — either over the phone or via video using VA Video Connect on their computers, smartphones, or tablets. To set up telephone or video appointments, veterans can send their provider a secure message on My HealtheVet by visiting myhealth.va.gov. Veterans may also call, but the VA is requesting that veterans only call with urgent needs at this time. To learn more about VA Video Connect, visit mobile.va.gov/app/va-video-connect.

Prescription Refills – Veterans can request prescription refills and order and ship medications to their homes using My HealtheVet or the Rx Refill mobile app. Download the app at mobile.va.gov/app/rx-refill. Veterans can also call the Sioux Falls VA pharmacy at 605-336-3230 option 1 for pharmacy and your prescriptions will be mailed to you.

Text Message Reminders – Veterans can use Annie’s Coronavirus Precautions protocol to send automated text messages with information about COVID-19. This application helps veterans monitor for symptoms and can assist if they need to contact their VA facility for care. Enroll at mobile.va.gov/annie.

Secure Messaging – With My HealtheVet, VA’s online patient portal, Veterans can send online secure messages to your VA health care team to ask them non-urgent health questions. Register at www.myhealth.va.gov.

For more information about VA’s Connected Care technologies, visit connectedcare.va.gov.

The Sioux Falls VA HCS is requesting all unscheduled patients and those with flu-like symptoms to call first. If you do not have a scheduled appointment or have flu like symptoms such as fever, cough and shortness of breath, call us at 605-336-3230 EXT. 5001.



What you need to know about Coronavirus (COVID-19)

This guide will help you learn how to use your VA health care benefits during this emerging health crisis and will provide links and resources you can reference to protect yourself and others.



U.S. Department
of Veterans Affairs

ChooseVA

What Veterans need to know about coronavirus (COVID-19)

If you develop symptoms of COVID-19, you should seek immediate medical advice on appropriate next steps (Note: symptoms are listed on the back page).

VA is ready to assist you. We have plans in place to protect everyone who receives health care, visits or works at one of our facilities. VA recommends the following:

1

Increase your awareness of COVID-19 symptoms by reading the VA and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) information.

- VA and CDC have posted and routinely update the latest information about COVID-19.
- Online addresses/links for both VA and CDC COVID-19 information are provided to the right.

2

Contact your VA Medical Center before going to a clinic, urgent care or emergency room, especially if you have symptoms of fever, cough or shortness of breath. Contacting us first helps us protect you, medical staff and other patients.

- For routine appointments, we recommend reaching out to your provider to ask about using telehealth (phone or video) for your scheduled appointment. You can also cancel and reschedule your appointment for a later date.
- To change your appointment to a telehealth appointment, send a secure message to your provider in My HealtheVet.

3

Leave time for screening

- If you visit a VA hospital, clinic, community living center, or other VA health care facility, you will be met at the entrance by a staff member.
- The staffer will greet you and ask you some screening questions.
- A VA health care professional will then assist you with the next steps of your visit.

4

Stay connected and healthy

Concerns about COVID-19 can be stressful for many people, and it's understandable to feel anxious. It's important to take steps to manage stress and take care of yourself. Stay in touch with friends and family by phone and social media, and get enough sleep and exercise.

HOW CAN I FIND
THE MOST CURRENT
INFORMATION ABOUT
COVID-19

- **Visit the CDC COVID-19** information page online at: <https://www.coronavirus.gov>
- **Learn about VA's public health response to COVID-19:** <https://www.va.gov/coronavirus>
- **Read FAQs for Veterans** about accessing your health care benefits during this outbreak: <https://www.va.gov/coronavirus-veteran-frequently-asked-questions>
- **Learn about ways to manage and enhance your mental health during the emerging health crisis:** <https://www.mentalhealth.va.gov/coronavirus>
- **Send your primary care provider a secure message through MyHealtheVet at:** <https://www.myhealth.va.gov/mhv-portal-web/home>

How is COVID-19 spread?

According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) the virus is thought to spread mainly from person-to-person.

- Between people who are in close contact with one another (within about 6 feet).
- Through respiratory droplets produced when an infected person coughs or sneezes. These droplets can land in the mouths or noses of people who are nearby or possibly be inhaled into the lungs.
- Droplets can also land and remain active on surfaces several hours to days depending on the surface material.

Who is most at risk of contracting COVID-19?

Older adults (60+) and people who have severe chronic medical conditions like heart or lung disease or diabetes are at higher risk for developing complications from COVID-19. If you are in this population, please consult with your VA health care provider about additional steps you may be able to take to protect yourself.

What are the most effective ways to protect myself?**Clean your hands often**

- Wash your hands often with soap and warm (or hot) water for at least 20 seconds, especially after you have been in a public place or after blowing your nose, coughing or sneezing. An easy way to mark the time is to hum the “Happy Birthday” song from beginning to end twice while scrubbing.
- If soap and water are not readily available, use a hand sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol. Cover all surfaces of your hands and rub them together until they feel dry.
- Avoid touching your eyes, nose and mouth with unwashed hands.

Avoid close contact

- Avoid close contact with people who are sick.
- Put distance between yourself and other people if COVID-19 is spreading in your community. This is especially important for people who are at higher risk of getting very sick.

Clean and disinfect frequently

- Touched surfaces daily. This includes tables, doorknobs, light switches, countertops, handles, desks, phones, keyboards, toilets, faucets and sinks.
- If surfaces are dirty, clean them—use detergent or soap and water prior to disinfection.
- For more complete and updated information on cleaning and disinfecting visit CDC online at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-nCoV/index.html>

Getting a flu shot is recommended**ADDITIONAL INFORMATION****What are COVID-19 symptoms?**

COVID-19 symptoms include:
fever, cough and shortness of breath.

I am sick with COVID-19 or think I might have it. How can I best protect others?

If you are sick, stay home except to get medical care.

Cover coughs and sneezes:

- Cover your mouth and nose with a tissue (or use inside of your elbow).
- Throw used tissues in the trash.
- Immediately wash your hands with soap and warm water for at least 20 seconds. If soap and water are unavailable, clean your hands with sanitizer that contains at least 60% alcohol.

Wear a facemask if you are sick when:

- You are around other people (e.g. sharing a room or a vehicle).
- Before entering a health care facility.

If you are NOT sick, you do not need to wear a facemask unless you are caring for someone who is sick.

Where can I learn more about COVID-19?

- How to protect against coronavirus at: <https://www.cdc.gov/coronavirus/2019-ncov/prepare/prevention.html>
- Handwashing video at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d914EnpU4Fo>
- Isolation vs. Quarantine – Know the Difference Information at: https://www.publichealth.va.gov/n-coronavirus/docs/Isolation_Quarantine_Poster_prevent17-2020.pdf

2020 Census Infogram

DENVER/DALLAS REGION

MARCH 24, 2020

Coming Your Way Every Tuesday

The 2020 Census is underway and households across America are responding every day. In light of recent developments, the U.S. Census Bureau has adjusted 2020 Census operations.

STATUS OF CURRENT OPERATIONS

Activity/Operation	Planned Schedule	Adjustment	Revised Schedule
Self-Response Phase (online, phone, mail)	March 12–July 31	Extended	March 12–August 14
Update Leave	March 15–April 17	Delayed	March 29–May 1
Update Enumerate	March 16–April 30	Suspended and extended	March 16–May 14
Mobile Questionnaire Assistance	March 30–July 31	Delayed	April 13–August 14
Early Nonresponse Followup (NRFU)	April 9–July 31	Delayed	May 7–August 14
Nonresponse Followup (NRFU) and NRFU Reinterview	May 13–July 31	Delayed	May 28–August 14
Group Quarters Enumeration	April 2–June 5	Delayed	April 16–June 19
Service-Based Enumeration	March 30–April 1	Delayed	April 29–May 1
Census counts people experiencing homelessness outdoors	April 1	Delayed	May 1
Enumeration of Transitory Locations	April 9–May 4	Delayed	April 23–May 18
Deliver apportionment counts to the President	By December 31	On schedule	By December 31
Deliver redistricting counts to states	By April 1, 2021	On schedule	By April 1, 2021

Counting College Students

We are adjusting operations to make sure college students are counted.

- College students living in on-campus housing are counted through their university as part of our Group Quarters Operation, which counts all students living in university owned housing. In addition to college dormitories, the Group Quarters Operation also includes places like nursing homes, group homes, halfway houses and prisons.
- During our recent 2020 Census Group Quarters Advance Contact operation we contacted college/university student housing administrators to get their input on the enumeration methods that will allow students to participate in the 2020 Census.

Watch: [Video about College Students](#)

Denver Region Response Rates (as of March 24, 2020)

Arizona	23.5%
Colorado	24.1%
Kansas	27.9%
Montana	17.3%
Nebraska	30.2%
New Mexico	17.1%
North Dakota	23.2%
Oklahoma	21.5%
South Dakota	25.6%
Texas	19.9%
Utah	25.4%
Wyoming	17.7%
National	23.6%

Current Ads Running

Get Out the Count Video Prize Challenge

Explain why the census matters in a short (30 seconds to 3 minutes) video, designed for a platform such as YouTube, that uses entertainment, emotion, creativity, and/or humor to motivate people to respond. Prizes will be allocated as follows:

- \$30,000 for a grand prize winner
- \$10,000 for a runner-up
- \$10,000 for a student prize

View the full eligibility rules on [challenge.gov](https://www.census.gov/challenge).

Helpful Links

[2020 Census Response Rate map](#)
[Dallas RCC Coronavirus Information Hub](#)
[Fact Sheet: 2020 Census Operational Adjustments Due to COVID-19 \(Long Version\)](#)
[Census Field Operations Suspended Until April 1](#)
[2020 Census FAQ](#)
[Census Newsroom](#)
[Statistics in Schools](#)
[Video about College Students](#)
[Census YouTube Channel](#)
 Follow the Census at @uscensus.gov

Shape
your future
START HERE >

United States
Census
2020

UPCOMING EVENTS

Apr 17—Purple Up Day in South Dakota

Apr 21—KELOLAND Career Expo—Rushmore Mall—Rapid City—11:00 am—4:00 pm (MT)

May 8—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

May 10—Mothers Day

May 12—8th Annual WWII Veterans Luncheon—TREA Building—Rapid City—11:00 am (MT)

May 15-17—DAV State Convention—Brookings

May 19—SDDVA Mini Conference—Rapid City—10:00 am—2:00 pm (MT)

May 20—SDDVA Mini Conference—Pierre—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

May 21—SDDVA Mini Conference—Sioux Falls—10:00 am—2:00 pm (CT)

May 25—MJFSVH Memorial Day Car Show—MJFSVH Campus—Hot Springs—11:30 am—3:00 pm (MT)

May 25—Memorial Day

May 25—State Offices closed

Jun 3-7—VFW State Convention—Aberdeen

Jun 14—Flag Day

Jun 18-21—American Legion State Convention—Huron

Jun 21—Fathers Day

Jul 6—Black Hills National Cemetery Unaccompanied Veterans Memorial Service—9:00 am (MT)

Jul 10—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Bldg. 145—Room 108—Fort Meade VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Aug 22—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 7

Aug 24-27—SDDVA Annual Benefit School—Ramkota Conference Center—Pierre

Sep 3—Veterans Day at the SD State Fair

Sep 3-7—SD State Fair

Sep 5—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 8

Sep 11—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—VFW Post 1273—Rapid City—10:00 am (MT)

Sep 19—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 9

Oct 10—Midwest Honor Flight—Mission 10

Oct 26-30—National Summit on Women Veterans Issues (more information coming)

Nov 13—VABHHCS VSO Congressional Forum—Domiciliary Auditorium—Hot Springs VAMC—10:00 am (MT)

Audry Ricketts, Public Information Officer

South Dakota Department of the Military <http://military.sd.gov>

South Dakota Department of Veterans Affairs <http://vetaffairs.sd.gov>

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